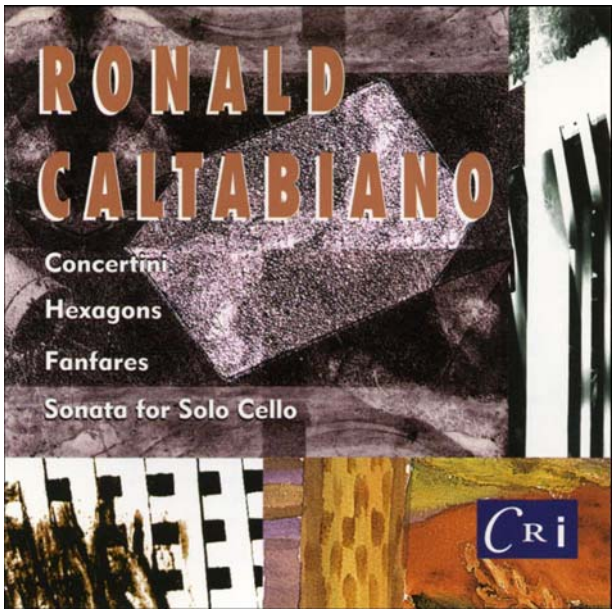
NWCR835

Ronald Caltabiano



Hexagons for woodwind quintet and piano (1994) ..... (16:55)

1. I. Allegro ..... (1:24)
2. II. Allegro ma sempre flessibile ..... (3:07)
3. III. Flowing ..... (4:36)
4. IV. Moderato con moto ..... (2:29)
5. V. Resoluto ..... (2:40)
6. VI. Allegro ..... (2:29)

Hexagon Ensemble: Susan Rotholz, flute; Matthew Dine, oboe; Alan R. Kay, clarinet; Nancy Billmann, horn; Michael Finn, bassoon; James Winn, piano

Sonata for Solo Cello (1982) ..... (17:05)

7. I. Transformations ..... (8:32)
8. II. Variations ..... (8:33)

Fred Sherry, cello

9. *Fanfares* for harpsichord (1994) ..... (6:56)
   I. Sonoro
   II. Decisivo
   III. Declamando

Joyce Lindorff, harpsichord

Concertini (version for 15 instruments) (1991) ..... (22:12)

10. I. Allegro molto ..... (1:01)
11. II. Andante piacevole ..... (2:40)
12. III. Allegro molto ..... (1:18)
13. IV. Andante moderato ..... (2:40)
14. V. Andante subito accelerando ..... (2:35)
15. VI. Andante ..... (3:11)
16. VII. Andante: Presto ..... (2:24)
17. VIII. Allegro molto ..... (1:18)
18. IX. Adagio sustenuto ..... (2:45)
19. X. Allegro ..... (2:20)

The Group for Contemporary Music: Tara O'Connor, flute; Brian Greene, oboe; Charles Neidich, clarinet; Mike Finn, bassoon; William Purvis, Stewart Rose, horns; Ray Mase, trumpet; Michael Powell, trombone; Curtis Macomber, Sunghae Anna Lim, Lois Martin, violins; Fred Sherry, cello; Lewis Paer, contrabass; John Ferrari, percussion; Margaret Kampmeier, piano; Ronald Caltabiano, conductor

Total playing time: 63:08

Notes

Color and upbeat driving energy, plus plenty of the other forward qualities, characterize **Ronald Caltabiano**'s music and especially his Sonata for Solo Cello. The earliest work on this disc, completed in June 1982, it was written when he was in his early twenties (he was born in 1959) and still a student at the Juilliard School. He was about to embark on a year with Elliott Carter as his teacher, though he seems to have already learned from Carter's music how to create a physical sense of movement in fully chromatic music, a sense that comes from the composer's and the listener's shared conviction that the right notes are happening in the right register at the right time. You feel that each gesture goes in the only way it could go—but then part of how the music progresses is by finding other ways. The titles of the sonata's two movements, "Transformations" and "Variations," indicate the importance of this principle of altered similarity, which can be heard in a very direct way in the recurrences of one simple, urgent motif in the first movement (at 45", 2'33", and 3'53"). This is the trick of making deliberate decisions (to repeat) in ways that sound non-deliberate: natural, inevitable, part of the music's growth.

Caltabiano uses that trick in another way by his combination of quasi-serial operations with a small-interval melodiousness that can suggest plainchant (especially where there are repeated notes) or even American folk or popular song. In other words, Modernist abstraction works freely and easily with a recovery of older, simpler musical values, especially those musical values inherent in the human voice. Rather curiously, vocal music forms only a small part of his output to date. [As this CD is in production, Caltabiano's chamber opera, *Marrying the Hangman*, to a text by Margaret Atwood, has been premiered in Great Britain, and a new song cycle for soprano, flute, and harp, also with an Atwood text, is nearly completed.] While none of the pieces on this CD is vocal, they are all full of patterns that could be sung. Again the first movement of the cello sonata shows this: Fast sections alternate with slower, lyrical passages, the latter increasing in length and variety as the former become ever more compact. The big declamation at the start of the movement is reduced to a figure using just seven notes, while the andante music, which at first is a single note (A) with decoration, grows into a pentatonic melody, whose chromatic additions fall away to leave, at the end, a pure pentatonic theme inherited from Alexander Tcherepnin. (The sonata was commissioned by the Tcherepnin Society for the fifth anniversary of Alexander's death.)

The second movement is in six sections, of which the first should perhaps already be regarded as a variation, since it fluidly sets out some characteristic intervals, shapes, and harmonies rather than projects a finished theme. But besides offering something new, this movement is also a replay of the first. The "intervals, shapes, and harmonies" of its opening sequence come from the andante music of the first movement, and their tempo is the same. The next three sections stay at that tempo: the second is a melody with pizzicato accompaniment, the third pure melody in quicker notes, the fourth more in the style of the first, but with the long notes played without vibrato rather than as harmonics, and with jerky interrupting figures performed *sul ponticello*. The fifth section is faster, and—surprisingly but satisfyingly—it reintroduces elements from the allegro music of the first movement, including the declamation already mentioned. Then, in the last section, that declamatory music returns, at its original tempo. What had slowly disappeared in the first movement is now fully restored.

Almost a decade separates the cello sonata from *Concertini* (1991), written in the period during which Caltabiano completed his studies and started a teaching career that led him from New York by way of Hong Kong to San Francisco, for whose Symphony the new piece was written (though what is recorded here is a chamber version with solo strings). During that time he gained experience in writing for larger ensemble and orchestra, but many essential features of his work remain: the music's growth by repeated new departures, its strong construction, its reworking of motifs from section to section, its variety of vivid characters, its strains of quasi-vocal melody.

Within *Concertini's* ten movements are connections the composer has partly identified: "Raucous rumblings of the first movement are made more linear in the introspective "Andante piacevole" that follows. The intervals of the third movement's rhythmic brass chorale are followed by a more melancholy treatment in the Andante moderato. Material first presented by strident and insistent winds in movement V also appears in VII, tutti sections, and in VIII, with maniacal obsession. A lyrical contrapuntal web of sound (VI) is later clarified in greater tranquility (IX). The kaleidoscopic finale allows echoes of all previous movements." Meanwhile the title is justified in that each movement is a little concerto—sometimes a concerto for orchestra, sometimes featuring a soloist or group: bassoon with piano and low strings (I), brass quartet (III), piccolo, oboe, and E clarinet (V), violin (VI), violin and viola (VII), or trumpet (IX). The feeling of continuity through the ten concertini comes not only from alternations of character and on motivic relationships (reinforced in the finale by the reappearance of the timpani, unheard since movements I and III), but also on large rises and falls in register. Such shifts had also, on a smaller scale, helped enliven the sections of the cello sonata; here they create a general curve of ascent (I through V) and slower descent.

Caltabiano dedicated the ten movements of *Concertini* to ten composers he admires, including three of his teachers: Carter (II), Peter Maxwell Davies (the only non-American, III), and Vincent Persichetti (in memoriam, IX). The others are George Perle (I), Donald Martino (II), Charles Wuorinen (IV), Ellen Zwilich (V), Jacob Druckman (VI), John Adams (VII), and Ned Rorem (X). In no evident sense are these composers or their styles portrayed in the respective movements: the homages are rather those from a colleague writing in his own musical world.

Fanfares was written for the harpsichordist Joyce Lindorff and dates from 1994. The first two movements are based on similar motifs, and offer clear examples of how Caltabiano will take an idea and let it walk, or run, then go back and let it do the same thing for a longer time or in another direction. Both these movements start from bright and simple things to end with dense chords unexpected from the instrument. The finale then makes a loop out of this trajectory, moving from dark melody to brilliant figures that are even more fanfare-like than those of the earlier movements but have the same wonderful tendency to complicate themselves into sonorous harmonies.

Hexagons, also from 1994, was written for the New Jersey-based group called Hexagon, consisting of wind quintet plus piano, but the work is hexagonal in other ways too. There are six movements, and the ideas seem to spring from dividing the twelve notes into two six-note groups. It is typical of Caltabiano, though, that the resulting harmonies strongly feature tonal intervals—thirds, fourths, fifths, octaves—and that melodies will often be in modes devised to suit the human voice. The most obvious example here is the pentatonic tune on the oboe in the third movement that has a linked sequence of different repercussions.

Hexagons is almost a condensed reworking of *Concertini* (compare the opening movements, which both seem to end too soon, opening broad musical spaces to be filled by the movements to come), and again there are concertini for the various instruments: bassoon and piano (I); flute, clarinet, and horn with piano, the oboe entering only near the end and the bassoon never (II); oboe, in a pastorale (III); horn and bassoon (IV); and clarinet, accompanied and imitated only by flute and oboe (V), the finale being for everyone.

Again, too, the movements are linked motivically, but the rhythmic and registral patternings are different. In rhythmic character the movements are arranged symmetrically, with end pieces that are both strongly pulsed and in the same allegro tempo, more flexible sections in second and fifth places, and slow movements in the middle. In terms of register, there are two smaller ascending waves, from the lowest register to the middle (I–III) and from the middle-low register to the highest (IV–VI). As if having moved along the six sides of a hexagon, the music returns to where it began, with boogie-woogie piano, strident chords, and reiterative semitone motifs. But time is not like space. No true return is possible. Things have been encountered and learned along the way, and the finale has to accommodate them while keeping up the beginning's hope.

—Paul Griffiths

Ronald Caltabiano's music has been hailed as having achieved "…a remarkable synthesis of modernism and romanticism, of violence and lyricism, of integrity and accessibility."

He first came to international attention in the early 1980s with his String Quartet No. 1, premiered in Great Britain by the Arditti Quartet and in the United States by the Juilliard String Quartet. A series of virtuoso solo pieces (double bass, cello, English horn, trombone, and violin) solidified his position among the leading American composers of his generation, and a series of prominent orchestral commissions soon followed. Works written for the San Francisco Symphony, the Dallas Symphony Orchestra, and the Cincinnati Symphony exhibit kaleidoscopic colors and provocative designs. Performances by international orchestras include those of the BBC Symphony, the Hong Kong Sinfonietta, and the Royal Scottish National Orchestra.

The composer's finely detailed chamber music has also been in demand around the world. Notable works include *Concerto for Six Players*, commissioned by the Fires of London for

their farewell performance; *On the Dissonant* and *Rotations*, both commissioned by Australian ensembles; and prominent commissions by American organizations, including the String Quartet No. 2 (Emerson Quartet), *Quilt Panels* (Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center), and Clarinet Quartet (consortium of new music ensembles).

The dramatic bent in Caltabiano's work naturally lends itself to vocal music, which has been an important focus throughout the composer's development, from the early song cycle, *First Dream of Honeysuckle Petals Falling*, through two dramatic cantatas, *Medea* and *Torched Liberty*, and his first theatrical work, the 1999 chamber opera *Marrying the Hangman*, on a text by Margaret Atwood, written for the British ensemble Psappha.

Major awards from the American Academy of Arts and Letters, the Guggenheim Foundation, and the Rockefeller Foundation were anticipated by a number of awards from BMI and ASCAP as well as two Bearns Prizes. Since working as assistant to Aaron Copland during the last five years of that composer's life, Caltabiano has served on the faculties of the Manhattan School of Music and the Peabody Conservatory, and currently teaches at San Francisco State University.

Born in 1959, Ronald Caltabiano is a BM/MM/DMA graduate of the Juilliard School, where he studied with Elliott Carter and Vincent Persichetti. In addition, he has studied composition with Peter Maxwell Davies and conducting with Harold Farberman and Gennadi Rozhdestvensky.

Production Notes

Hexagons, Sonata for Solo Cello, and *Concertini*:
Produced and engineered by Judith Sherman. Recorded at Studio C, SUNY Purchase, in 1998 and 1999.

Fanfares:
Recorded at Hong Kong Baptist University in 1994. Produced and engineered by Kwok-Ping John Chen.

CD mastered by Jen Wyler, engineer at Sony Music Studios, NYC.

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